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ABSTRACT

Bringing journals into upper-level foreign language classes painlessly involves students in the exploration of the second language and the writing process. The unstructured nature of journal writing allows for a free range of writing exercises that upgrade student language proficiency and help increase their control of grammar, structure, and style. Further, journals are flexible enough that they can be incorporated imaginatively into almost any language course, including literature-based courses, providing students with strong incentives for practicing the second language. At the end of a course of study, students can feel a sense of achievement in the journals, concrete souvenirs of passage through the stages of language learning. (MSE)

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JOURNAL-WRITING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Journal-Writing in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Recognizing that language students only make significant progress in their command of a foreign language by actively using the language, language teachers constantly seek methods that motivate students to use the language consistently. In upper-level courses this is sometimes difficult to accomplish. Although discussions in literature classes help students practice the language, such courses don't encourage language use as well as composition and conversation courses. Culture and civilization courses foster even less student practice, for frequently a large percentage of class time has to be devoted to lecturing or for showing audio-visual aids. But if students keep a journal, they use the language almost every day, insuring that they experience the continuity and spontaneity of the living language. Using journals in a variety of courses not only increases students' familiarity with the second language, but also increases students' awareness and control of structure and grammar. Before suggesting specific ways journals can be used successfully in language courses, however, I want to discuss the advantages of journal-writing in a foreign language and briefly discuss the second language writing process.

Keeping a journal works well for language students for several reasons. First, the journal is a workshop where the student can experience the flow of the language as well as begin to thrash out grammar, structure, and style problems. Because journals generally house personal and informal language, the language level of journals is one that students can control. Throughout the semester the journal is an ongoing record of the student's thoughts and ideas concerning the course material, useful in studying for tests or preparing written assignments. The journal is also a laboratory where the student can test ideas before bringing them into class discussions. And finally, journals force students to become more involved with the language as well as the subject matter.

Journal-writing has become a very popular art form in the twentieth century, as writers such as Anäls Nin, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann,

Franz Kakfa, Paul Klee and many others illustrate in many volumes of published diaries. Moreover, many diary writers in this century have been pioneers in the changes taking place in the diary form, as Tristine Rainer notes in her book *The New Diary*.[1] She points out that the new diary is a far cry from the "rigid daily calendar diary you may have kept as a child nor the factual travel journal . . . It has little to do with outdated notions and misconceptions of diary keeping as a self-discipline, a dutiful record of events, a narcissistic self-absorption, an escape from reality, or a nostalgic adherence to the past."[2] Instead the new diary is a source of psychological growth, as the twentieth century advocates of the diary, Anäls Nin, Carl Jung, Ira Progoff and Marion Milner have emphasized.[3]

Once Freud and Jung began to plumb the depths of the personality, individuals have tried to find ways to get into contact with the inner recesses of their personality. Jung used diary writing to get in touch with the unconscious and the collective unconscious.[4] Nin used it to reach her intuitive side and as a writing laboratory to polish her writing style.[5] Progoff, a student of Jung's, has devised a rather complicated, but productive journal process that leads journal-keepers to self-revelation.[6] Marion Brackett Milner, in her book *A Life of One's Own*, written under the pseudonym JoAnna Field, uses a diary written several years earlier as a starting place for the self-analysis in the book. She evaluates current self-perceptions by commenting on her earlier diary entries, thus showing how she grew psychologically.[7] All of these people have evolved diary techniques for self-expansion. As Rainer notes, among other things the new diary can be:

> . . . a path to self-awareness and self-knowledge . . . a place to rehearse future behavior . . . a technique for focusing your energies on what is immediately important . . . a way to organize and expand your time . . . a place to find creative solutions to problems . . . a memory aid . . . a means of achieving self-identity . . . a way to enjoy and profit from solitude . . . a guide to finding clarity in the midst of crisis or change . . . a means of accelerating or concluding psychotherapy . . .

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[1]Tristine Rainer, *The New Diary* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1978).

[2]Rainer, pp. 17-18.

[3]Rainer, pp. 21-27.

[4]See Rainer pp. 21-22. As Rainer notes, Jung used a diary extensively when he was working out his dream and myth symbology.

[5]Nin now has 9 volumes of diaries published. *The Diary of Anäls Nin*, 7 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1974,1980); *Linotte: The Early Diary of Anäls Nin*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1978, 1982).

[6]See Progoff's *At a Journal Workshop* (New York: Dialogue House Library, 1975).

[7](Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1936).

> A place to develop skills of self-expression . . . a way to gain perspective on your emotions and to resolve the past . . . a means of keeping in touch with the continuity and rhythms of your life . . . a place to record meaningful insights . . . a device for freeing your intuition and imagination . . . a tool for recording and understanding dreams . . . a workbook for creative writing and drawing . . . a safe place to take intellectual and creative risks . . . a source book for future projects . . . [8]

In this expanded form of the diary, the diary can become very useful in learning a foreign language, for challenging students to keep a journal becomes a method for them to experiment with the new language at the same time they are learning things about the writing process and about themselves. It can be an excellent learning tool in almost any language course in the curriculum—for so-called second-year reading courses, for conversation and composition courses, as well as for literature and culture courses. Journal-writing becomes a bridge for language students between carefully coreographed language exercises and the free sense of proficiency, for journal-writing immerses students in the foreign language writing process, thus helping them achieve proficiency. By writing consistently students experience the excitement of composing in the second language and very quickly begin to feel comfortable with their ability in the new language.

Furthermore, as the journal is basically an unstructured form, journal-writing lends itself to practice methods that our colleagues in English prefer to emphasize in teaching composition. If you examine current college English composition textbooks you find that textbook writers stress the process of writing. In the past, English teachers have brought many examples of good writing into the classroom and have then asked students to reproduce good writing, without giving them much information about the steps in between. They have stressed product, but have not paid much attention to the other stages of writing—invention, editing, or revising. Peter Elbow in his books *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*, on the other hand, insists that these aspects must be stressed for he emphasizes that writing involves two stages which call on completely different types of thinking.[9] The first stage uses the creative and intuitive mode of thinking and the second stage activates critical acuity. Furthermore, these two modes conflict with each other. As he says "the two mentalities needed for these two processes—an inventive fecundity and a tough critical-mindedness

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[8]Rainer, pp. 18-19.

[9]Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

—flower most when they get a chance to operate separately."[10] Elbow insists that freewriting—writing continuously for a specific, but relatively short time period, with no preconceived plan—is the best way to start a writing project.[11] For him the goal of freewriting is a process, not a product. But he also sees it as the only way to generate good ideas and vivid images. Freewriting allows the mind to play free and to associate freely, so that it teaches you "to write without thinking about writing."[12] It is writing unhindered by restrictions of spelling, grammar, or rules. For him even the lowliest forms of writing—memos, committee reports, etc.—profit from this two-cycle writing technique. Freewriting is then followed by editing—culling out mistakes, cutting, rearranging, polishing. In the second stage, the critical mind evaluates the freewriting and revises and shapes it into a finished product. This is contrary to the old idea of carefully following a complex outline, a process which generally ends up with the writer proceeding with fits and starts, never really feeling the flow of words tumbling out onto the page. In *Writing with Power*, Elbow devises several strategies for various writing assignments. For easy writing, such as memos, reports, important letters, etc., he recommends the "direct writing approach,"[13] that is simply deciding on an amount of time that can be given to the assignment and then splitting the time in half—the first part for freewriting and the remainder for tidying up. For more complex assignments, he fashions elaborate methods, such as the "open-ended writing process"[14] or the "loop-writing process."[15]

Elbow's stress on freewriting and revising suggests that a similar method might be very profitable in learning a foreign language. for in order to compose in a foreign language, students need first to think in the second language without considering the annoying restrictions of grammar rules. Although the actual thought processes used in writing in the native language may be different from the thought processes used in writing in a second language, as common sense tells us there are nevertheless two distinct modes operating. Composing and thinking in a foreign language involves an

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[10]Elbow, *Writing With Power*, p. 7.

[11]Elbow, *Writing with Power*, pp. 13-19.

[12]Elbow, *Writing with Power*, p. 15.

[13]Elbow, *Writing with Power*, p. 26.

[14]Elbow recommends the "open-ended writing process" for very long writing projects, for he suggests long-term freewriting to allow ideas to become fully defined, sometimes causing completely new ideas to develop. See *Writing with Power*, p. 50.

[15]The "loop writing process" takes a position between the shortest writing process, "the direct writing process" and the longest writing process, "the open-ended writing process". It involves several freewrites, but yet focuses on one topic or idea. See *Writing with Power*, p. 59.

entirely different mental process than the critical one involved in trying to find and remove grammar errors. Students need to experience the language before trying to correct it. In the second stage, they can analyze what they have written to cull out grammar errors, and revise or edit their work, much as they revise their native-language writing.

Journal-writing naturally aids this two-fold language learning process, for the journal gives them the freedom to compose without being hampered by thinking about grammar restrictions.

Bringing journals into the foreign language classroom proves to be an easy task, for they can easily be adapted to aid the instruction goals of almost any class. In literature classes journals can become response journals, using many of the ideas of the reader response criticism—literary criticism that focuses on the reader's reaction to a literary text, and not just the text alone. Reader-response literary critics such as Norman Holland, David Bleich and Stanley Fish emphasize that interpreting literature not only involves analyzing the work itself, but more important involves analyzing the reader's response to the work of literature.[16] Although all three men have various views on this process, all would agree that any attempt to evaluate a literary work would be pointless without consideration of the reader's reaction. David Bleich, for example, insists that the interpretation of literature can change given a reader's or several readers' responses, and suggests that a work's meaning must be interpreted in the light of the responses of the community. In teaching literature, Bleich considers the class to be the community, and he asks his students to write down their emotional responses to their reading, stressing their experiential response.[17] He then uses the responses of the class as the foundation for the discussion of the readings, reproducing the students' responses as a supplementary text.

This method provides the students subtle ways to evaluate a text and can enlighten even the most experienced teacher. Responses raise questions about confusing points, suggest further avenues for class discussion at the same time they express the students' emotional reaction to the work. Students' responses frequently change the perceptions and teaching strategies of the teacher. In addition, as the whole class studies the responses, more attention is paid to language use.

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[16]For an excellent survey of reader response criticism, see ***Reader Response Criticism: Formulism to Post-Structuralism***, ed. Jane P. Tompkins, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1981).

[17]For more information concerning Bleich's method, see his book ***Subjective Criticism***, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1978).

Instead of asking foreign language students to write several long responses a semester, teachers can require response journals. Every class meeting students write a paragraph in response to the reading assignment, describing their feelings about some aspect of the text. In fourth-year language literature classes these journal entries become the basis for class discussion, providing students with a way to test ideas and language before contributing them to class discussions. For although fourth-year students generally have some proficiency in the second language, they still need consistent preparation in order to actively take part in class discussions. In addition, such consistent writing can help the students perceive the continuity of the course material and allow them to see more quickly correlations and contrasts between several works being studied. Response journals also help the teacher see the students' prejudices as well as his or her own and suggest to the teacher which ideas from the text need to be stressed or which portions should be clarified. The teacher might take up the journals two to three times a semester to check on grammar and style progression, although students should be urged to self-correct their journals from time to time.

More structured activity may be needed on the third year, for on this level students are even more unsure of themselves in the language as well as in their ability to analyze literature. Asking third-year students to work together works very well. When class begins, students divide into groups of three and each group discusses their written responses to the assignment, then the students work together creating a statement that they give to the whole class. This whole activity, taking about twenty minutes of class, leads naturally into the class discussion and provides an easy way for all members of the class to actively participate. This exercise also allows students to freewrite and then edit their freewriting as a group. It is a very good initiation into writing in the second language and at the same time it places pressure on the more average student. In one class, a very weak student taking the third year for a requirement only began to work much harder when he had to help his classmates. He wanted to contribute badly enough that he really began to learn German.

Students unaccustomed to discussing literature can really have a problem in a foreign language where expression is so difficult. Some structured written assignments can help these students to read and analyze literature better. Some of the diary-writing techniques that Rainer mentions in her book *The New Diary* can easily be adapted to literature classes and provide ways to motivate students to write in their journals. According to Rainer journal-writing consists of cathartic, descriptive, free-intuitive or reflective writing.[18] To stimulate writing in a journal, she offers several

[18]Rainer, p. 52.

writing devices such as making lists, creating portraits, writing from an altered point of view, writing a letter, or creating dialogues.[19] Such devices easily suggest journal assignments. For example, students can create dialogues between characters, or between themselves and a character. They can write letters to one of the characters, or rewrite an incident from the point of view of another character, or write a dialogue that didn't take place in the work. Such exercises are very effective in involving students in the material and in their journals.

The following writing suggestions created for Gerhart Hauptmann's play *Lonely Lives* indicate some possible journal assignments.

— Write about attitudes in the play that make you angry.
— Write about characters that make you angry.
— Assume the role of Käthe, Johannes, or Anna and complain about your life or how the others treat you.
— Describe your reaction to the play.
— Describe the family life of the play.
— List important attitudes present in the play.
— List key words to describe the play.
— List words that help you recall the important passages in the play.
— List words that describe the emotions or perhaps hidden emotions of the characters.
— Using first person, write down the feelings of one of the characters.
— Writing from the point of view of one of the characters, defend your actions in one of the scenes or tell how unhappy one of the incidents in the play made you.
— Write a letter from Käthe to Johannes.
— Write a letter from Johannes to Anna.
— Write a letter to one of the characters condemning him or her for his or her actions.
— Write a letter to one of the characters praising him or her for his or her actions.
— Create a dialogue between two aspects of one of the characters—between Kä the wife and Käthe the woman, or between Johannes the husband and Johannes the man, or between Anna the woman and Anna the student.

Journal-writing is a natural extension in conversation and composition courses. In these classes where the subject matter does not limit the possible topics of the course, personal writing can be pursued extensively with the diary being the laboratory. In the lab—the journal—the student can work

[19]Rainer, pp. 72-114.

out first attempts for skits, dialogues, themes, or any other writing assignment. In this type of course where students need to generate imaginative ideas, the journal is the perfect place to freewrite, perhaps using Elbow's loop technique, where the student freewrites for several minutes, then begins again using the most meaningful sentence of the first freewriting as the focus of the second timed freewriting.[20] Students can continue this until they are satisfied with the ideas they create and then can begin shaping and revising the material for the finished assignment.

In culture courses where so much time may be spent with the professor lecturing or students viewing slides, listening to records, or using other audio-visual aids, keeping students actively using the language may be particularly difficult. Asking them to keep a response journal is one method that at least insures that they will be using the second language, even if they don't have as much opportunity for class discussions.

Emphasizing the biographies and creative endeavor of poets, artists, composers, philosophers, scientists, and others who have in some way shaped the cultural characteristics of a people can enliven a culture course. Students react to leading figures by giving their impressions of these people after studying their biographies. The form of their responses needn't necessarily be straightforward. For example, they could interview the figure, or create several diary entries that the person might have written during an important period of his or her life, or they could send him or her a fan letter. Students can become quite imaginative in such assignments. One student described Nietzsche's rather eccentric personal habits by creating diary entries from his cook. Another assumed the role of Albrecht Dürer's wife and wrote the artist a frank letter, complaining about her exhausting life. Students have interviewed Einstein, Beethoven, and Mozart among others, and one traveled through time to interview an ordinary peasant during the Middle Ages. These assignments are particularly good for third-year students for the level of language is not complex. Students who are creative writers also like these assignments, for it is an interesting assignment for them to try to bring historical figures to life. In addition, students not only divulge how much information they have acquired in such exercises, but also feel very pleased about their work. They also enjoy such assignments so much that they frequently spend a lot of time completing them. Once again the journal can easily provide the laboratory for such exercises. Freewriting in the journal only adds to the creativity. Over the course of a semester, students can keep running dialogues with great figures in their journals, trying to fathom the importance and influence of great men and women.

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[20]Elbow, *Writing with Power*, p. 59.

Bringing journals into upper-level language classes painlessly involves students in consistently exploring the second language and the course material. The unstructured nature of journal-writing allows for a free range of writing exercises that help students upgrade their language proficiency and increase their control of grammar, structure, and sty'e. Further, journals are flexible enough so that they can imaginatively be incorporated into almost any course in the language spectrum, providing students with strong incentives for practicing the second language. At the end of a course of study, students can feel a sense of achievement when they tuck away their battered, marked-up journals—concrete souvenirs of their passage through the stages of learning a foreign language.